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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000535

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONVENES SPRING SESSION

REF: A) HANOI 129; B) 06 HANOI 3012

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) The 11th and final session of the 11th National Assembly (2002-2007) convened on March 20. With its elections in the offing (May 20), the National Assembly's (NA) shortened spring session will continue the legislature's focus on corruption, waste and mismanagement, and will include a review of major infrastructure projects. The Assembly will also discuss procedures and timing related to national amnesties. What this session will not do is hold debates on some of Vietnam's more sensitive draft laws, including the Law on Associations and the Law on Domestic Violence. End Summary.

Focus on Corruption...

¶2. (SBU) The final session of the 11th National Assembly (2002-2007) convened March 20 and will run until April 6, concluding earlier than normal due to the May 20 elections for the next National Assembly. Among the laws scheduled for passage during this session is an amended Law on the Organization of the National Assembly. In addition to addressing a number of procedural issues, this amended law is designed to facilitate greater NA input into anti-corruption efforts and bolster the legislature's monitoring and supervision of the 2006 Anti-Corruption Law's implementation. In particular, GVN representatives will provide progress reports on the implementation of Anti-Corruption Law and the Law on Thrift Practices and Anti-Wastefulness.

...as well as Waste and Mismanagement

¶3. (SBU) Keenly aware of public interest in and concern about waste and mismanagement at large infrastructure projects, the NA will call in for questioning the Minister of Industry to discuss several ongoing projects, including the Son La Hydropower project in the Northwest Highlands (Ref A), the Dung Quat Oil Refinery Project off the coast of Central Vietnam, the Ca Mau Gas-Electricity-Fertilizer Project at the southern tip of Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh National Highway Project. The NA will also review the Government's Proposal for the Gas-Electricity-Fertilizer Project in Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province, as well as plans for construction of a new National Assembly Hall in Hanoi.

Future Amnesties

¶4. (SBU) The Assembly is also scheduled to review the Law on Special

Amnesties and will discuss setting the dates for future general amnesties and reductions in prison sentences, as well as extradition-related issues. According to Office of the National Assembly Chairman Bui Ngoc Thanh, the GVN is considering Independence Day (September 2, 2007) and Reunification Day (April 30, 2008) for the next large amnesties.

Happy Hung Vuong Day

¶5. (SBU) The NA action that will likely garner the most attention is its expected passage of an amendment to the Labor Law that will establish an additional Vietnamese national holiday. This will make a total of nine official annual public holidays in Vietnam, and this newest holiday will fall on March 10 of the lunar calendar year. (Note: The new holiday will be celebrated on April 26th this year and will change every year due to fluctuations in the lunar calendar. End note.) The holiday will honor the death of King Hung Vuong, who is widely viewed as the Founder of the Vietnamese nation.

What's not on the Agenda

¶6. (SBU) According to our contacts, the Assembly will hold off discussion of more sensitive draft laws, such as the Law on Association and the Law on Domestic Violence, until the next National Assembly is formed (Ref B). These contacts quickly add that it is not clear when during the next Assembly's tenure, which runs until 2012; these laws will be put in the docket.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The NA's focus on corruption, waste and mismanagement is in line with the legislature's ongoing efforts to carve an oversight and ombudsman role for itself. The examination of large energy

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infrastructure projects is particularly timely as Vietnam's booming economy, coupled with a drought that has dented hydropower generation capacity, has left it with energy shortages across the country and the situation only getting worse (septel). Ongoing shortages and periodic blackouts in northern Vietnam have put the country in a position of having to purchase significant amounts of energy from China. End Comment.

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